

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	BA
Major(s)	Theatre / Philosophy
Exchange Institution	State University of New York at New Paltz
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 2, 2015, and Trimester 1, 2016 (US Academic Year)

B: Finances

Please detail your basic costs in New Zealand dollars. This will help future students plan their own budgets. (Enter your number rounded to the nearest dollar.)

Books	300
Accommodation	5245 per semester
Return Airfare	2000
Local Transportation	-- (taxis were \$5 but walking everywhere is easier)
Meals	2770 per semester (on a meal plan, required if you live in a hall)
Visa	200
Health & Insurance	1065 per semester
Personal Spending	300
Communications (phone, etc.)	42.60 per month (no data plan, on AT&T. Phone networks are EXPENSIVE but everyone just has an iphone and uses imessage)
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend?

I originally hadn't expected to spend as much, but that was just because I was being optimistic. I saved a lot by not buying textbooks from the campus bookstore (renting is available but I just bought them online secondhand for a lot cheaper)

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)?

I used a foreign bank account, which mostly went well. A lot of places only take cash, or else have a really outdated version of debit, which takes a little getting used to.

What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you?

If you're living on campus, don't bother buying food. Ever. You've already paid for the food on campus, make use of it.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?

About \$2 or so, but not really worth it for the coffee (starbucks is considered 'good coffee' there)

C: Visas & Insurance **Please note this information is recommended by VUW students & current at the time of their exchange. For all up-to-date visa information you must check with the embassy/consulate of your host university.*

Did you have to apply for a visa? If so, was it difficult? What was the process, how long did it take and how much did it cost?

Yes, I had to apply for a visa. It wasn't difficult, but it was a little expensive (\$200 and a trip to Auckland). The interview seemed a little unnecessary too, since it took 5 minutes and had me waiting two hours in the office.

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country?

Apply as soon as you get your required paperwork. It's so much easier. Also make sure you won't need your passport the week you apply, because I made that mistake and ended up having to mail them my passport once I was done with it.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance? Or a particular insurance they recommended? If Yes, what was it and how much did it cost?

New Paltz has its own insurance it requires of all international students. It's through the school but via aetna. It was around \$1065 a semester.

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students?

N/A - I used the mandatory one.

D: Academics at Host University

Which courses did you take while on exchange? Please rate the difficulty of each course (1-5, 1 = Very Easy & 5 = Extremely Difficult) and leave any comments you may have.

Course Title	Language of Instruction	VUW course equivalent or elective	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
VUW Trimester 1/YEAR					
Acting I	English	THEA113	15	2	
Philosophy of Language	English	PHIL331	15	3	
Contemporary Issues in Literature	English	-	15	1	Set up like a high school English class, and graded like one too
Voice for	English	-	15	4	

Musical Theatre					
VUW Trimester 2/YEAR					
Jazz Dance	English	-	15	3	
American Philosophy	English	PHIL309	15	2	
Theatre History II	English	-	15	1	Every test was multiple choice
Fiction into Film	English	-	15	2	
Women in Literature	English	-	15	1	

Course Registration/Enrolment

Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available?

It was a little difficult to register, since you have to fill out a physical form and give it into the international students' office, or else email the international coordinator, but there are a few advisors available to talk you through the process.

How successful were you in registering/enrolling for classes you wanted? What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your host university?

Register early!!!! It was very difficult getting into the classes I wanted to get into, because they open the registration for international students last, which means classes fill up almost immediately (all classes are limited entry, most only take around 30 students)

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses?

Even if the course you want is full, email the professor or course coordinator and explain your situation. They're usually pretty accommodating and understanding, or will at least give some alternative course suggestions for you.

Academic Experience

How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations?

It's set up a lot differently, sort of like a high school. Participation and attendance both count as a significant portion of your grade. Homework is often assigned weekly. It took a bit of getting used to, but it was enjoyable once the initial shock wore off.

How did the style of teaching at your host university compare with that at VUW? How did the workload compare to what you would expect at VUW?

The workload is definitely not as intense. The work is a lot more often, but the grading system is so much lower, there's a lot less effort required. Honestly, it's almost exactly like a high school.

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other VUW students visiting your partner university? What specific courses would you recommend to visiting VUW students? Why?

Five. I took four courses in my first semester, and even on top of my extracurricular activities, I still found myself with a lot of extra time that could have been put to better use. My second semester I took five courses and joined more clubs, and that semester was a lot better for me.

What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university?

Just turn up and make an effort!! Communicate with your professor if there's something you don't understand, because they really do care about you and they're there to help you. There's no need to be shy, office hours are there for a reason and if you can't handle that then email is a solid alternative.

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university?

You'd definitely need your own computer/laptop, but there are a lot of computers around and there's printers in pretty much every building. Internet access can be spotty in some places, but was overall pretty decent (and way faster than the wifi in NZ). The library just got renovated and it's gorgeous and super high tech.

If you went to a country where English is not the native language, how did you prepare for this? Were there any intensive language courses provided by the host university?

N/A

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Dorms

What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation?

You don't get to choose your roommates or anything, and that can end up being an issue if you don't get along with the people you live with (especially since a lot of American students aren't really used to cleaning up after themselves or living for themselves) but if you do like them, it's really good. Also, you will definitely have to share a room with somebody, which can be positive or negative. My roommate was another international student (from England) and she's one of the best friends I made on that entire exchange.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Definitely the dorms. It can be a little expensive, but it's worth it for the experience.

How early can you move into accommodation?

Usually about a week in advance

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food?

There were really no cooking facilities available, and the only things allowed in your room are a mini fridge and microwave. The food on campus is average, but bearable. As long as you get the right food in the dining hall, you'll be fine. The yogurt and granola is pretty decent, and the cookies are to die for.

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find? What should future VUW exchange students know about living off-campus?

N/A

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation?

The dorms are good, as long as you get a good one. Generally Hasbrouck quad dorms are the best, so try get in one of those. Off campus housing is a little hard to find, since it's such a small town, but there's a few hostels around. If you don't like your room or roommates, you're allowed to move at any time, just email the housing coordinator.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?

Local students were absolutely lovely and very welcoming in terms of friendship. Americans tended to be open and curious about New Zealand (most of what they know comes from one episode of Rocket Power) and they were very patient when explaining things that I didn't fully understand.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university?

It was a little difficult the first week, but it's honestly not that different from New Zealand, except bigger and more commercialized. The college is run sort of like a franchise; there's a mascot and merchandise and all those kinds of things. Also, the frat parties you see in movies are REAL, so be prepared.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

A lot of Americans don't understand New Zealand slang, or accents. It can be a little tiring, but just be prepared to repeat and explain yourself a lot, as well as talk a lot slower than you're used to. New Zealanders actually talk pretty fast.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

I definitely loved how welcoming everybody was, and how kind they all were. Americans are a lot less self-involved, and a lot more caring than their stereotypes give credit for.

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?

As I said earlier, everybody was absolutely lovely. There were the occasional rude people, but not nearly as many as there could have been. University staff were particularly kind, and very understanding when it came to issues of miscommunication.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university? For students who are visible minorities in your host country? For students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered?

America is known for its intolerance, but the town of New Paltz is very accepting. Almost everybody I met was polite, friendly, and accepting (with the occasional bigot in New York City, but that's pretty much part and parcel of the city).

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students?

N/A

G: Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

There are so many clubs and sports available, it's unreal! I didn't even have enough time to try them all, but I wish I had. Don't hesitate to try the 'nerdy' clubs, the people in them are some of the loveliest people you'll ever meet. New Paltz LARP in particular has some wonderful and compassionate and interesting people you will ever meet, and all of them were extremely welcoming to international students, and patient in explaining things that I didn't understand.

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?

Definitely go visit the city!! There's a lot of organized international student trips for holidays, take advantage of those. Six flags is worth the 3 hour drive, so give that a go. And DEFINITELY go visit Canada!! Niagara Falls is unreal, and they do a light show there at night.

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus?

On most visas, you won't be able to work off-campus without special permission. On-campus, you can really only be a night host or possibly a student assistant, which is minimum wage and basically means sitting around not doing a whole lot for a few hours. But it's good if you have the time.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

None of note, but there were a lot of clubs to do with volunteering, and plenty of charity fundraisers for various causes such as Circle K, Adopt-A-Highway, or Take Back The Night.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Umbrella (it doesn't rain often, but when it does, the rain goes straight down)
2	Jacket + boots (ESPECIALLY if you're going to be there when it's snowing)
3	Shower jandals (the showers are gross, don't risk it)
4	Camera, or smartphone with camera capabilities (obviously)
5	Sunglasses (both for sun protection, and for avoiding eye contact with people in the city)

5 pieces of useful advice would tell a VUW student going to your host university

1	Don't freak out or overthink it!! It's way easier than you think it will be
2	Keep in contact with your loved ones. Sometimes it might seem like they don't care, but they do.
3	Join as many clubs as possible, and don't discount anything
4	Take advantage of the resources available for international students
5	Don't be scared to look like an idiot or a tourist. That's when you have the most fun!

Top 5 Things to do

What are your 'Top 5 Things To Do' future VUW students at your host university or city/country?

1	Visit Toronto, Canada
2	Visit NYC and see a show on Broadway
3	Hike up Mohonk Reserve
4	Visit the local cafes
5	Go to a frat party (it'll be terrible, but you have to do it once)

H: Personal Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience. Plus, don't forget to submit some photos to the exchange office!!

My exchange experience in New Paltz was absolutely the best year of my life. I made some of the best friends I have ever had (whom I now miss terribly) and experienced more than I ever thought possible. I never thought I would have enjoyed it this much. I honestly changed and grew so much from my experience, and I think it was the best possible way to grow as a person. Leaving behind the place and people I'd grown to love was absolutely heartbreaking, but I know that I'll definitely be back in New Paltz in the future. I found a place that feels even more like home than New Zealand does, and I am forever grateful to everybody and everything that made this journey possible.